

As a directionally-challenged individual who learned to drive long before the Global Positioning System (GPS) was developed, I spent way too much time calling my husband from the car so he could pull out his map to direct me to where I was going. Early in our marriage, he would put me to the test, giving me the map to be the navigator on our trips. Needless to say, the result was never pretty because I usually ended up in tears and, to add insult to injury, never could fold the map back up the right way.

Asking a navigationally illiterate person to lead the way to True North is a risk, at least as understood geographically. The term True North is a navigational one, the opposite of magnetic north. In the use of a compass, magnetic north depends on the magnetic force in the area, causing variations in accuracy depending on location. In contrast, accurate navigation depends on finding True North. True North therefore is the absolute reference point in all the sojourner's travels. So...you see where we're going here...in the navigation of life, it is finding your true goal and not losing sight of it. True North is a non-negotiable and it will never change.

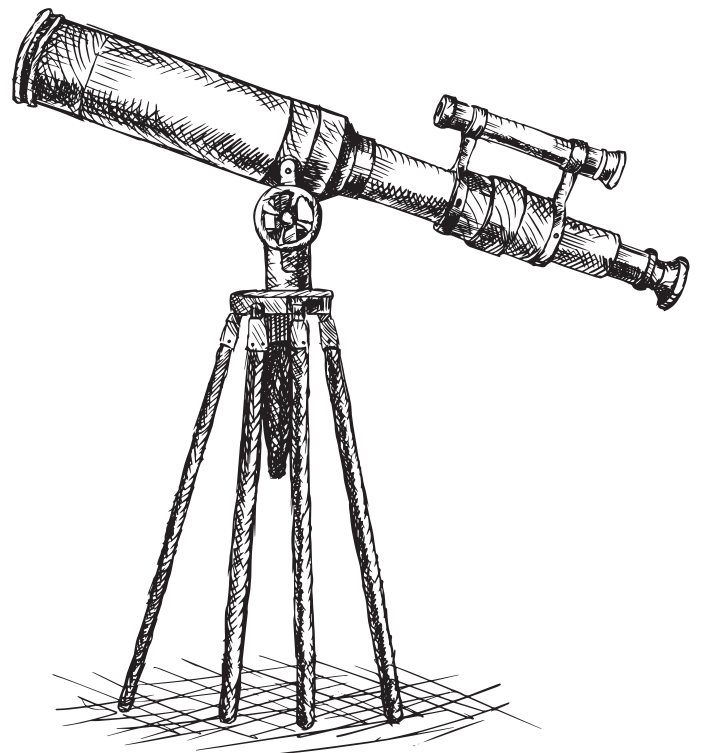
Hence the metaphor and the title of the book you hold. In life's journey, we are often uncertain where we stand, where we are going, and what is the best path for us personally. Knowing our True North enables us to follow the right path.

In the gospel of John, Jesus' disciples struggled with discerning their True North. Thomas expressed it to Jesus: "*We have no idea where you are going, so how can we know the way?*"

Jesus told him, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.*" (John 14:5-6 NLT). In our spiritual walk, there is only one True North and that is Jesus...accepting Him as Savior and responding to life as He did through the strength we receive from the Holy Spirit living within us. That's a tall order and, if you haven't noticed, life is complicated, so how do we connect this divine GPS in our souls so that we live a Christ-like life no matter what life throws at us?

The True North Bible Study has been prayed over and created with the unique challenges of today's young woman. This is for you, college student, as you study your way through a wide variety of schools of thought and strive to keep your faith intact. This is for you, young professional, so you can stand firm in the business world that often screams "*compromise to get ahead.*" This is for you, young mother, as you experience sleepless nights and runny noses, and can't even begin to count the number of times you've caught yourself mindlessly singing "*Let It Go*" from the movie "*Frozen*"! This is for today's woman who juggles faith, family, profession and a myriad of other demands in life.

How do we meet each one of these aspects of life staying centered on Jesus and knowing our spiritual True North? This study is simple in format and can be experienced with a small group or on your own. May the scripture references, readings, and reflective questions in the pages that follow give you certainty of the Goal. May this study pull you from the ever-changing urgent to the steadfast important that gives you a clearer point of reference which is Jesus Christ.



“Today you are you! That is truer than true!
 There is no one alive who is you—er than you!”

Dr. Seuss

“...our true self—the self we are becoming in
 God—is something we receive from God. Any other
 identity is of our own making and an illusion.”

David Benner

When asked, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” young children usually reply with a no-holds-barred kind of comeback that varies from veterinarian or teacher to superhero or rock star. In all actuality, they are telling us what they want to do when they grow up, not who they want to be. As adults, we are often asked the same question without the “...when you grow up” phrase tacked on. So how do we answer?

What do you want to be? Let’s put it in the here and now...who are you? We grow up with lines crossing when it comes to our being and doing. We are far more than what we do! If we are not careful we find our identity in what we do. Once the “doing” aspect of our lives changes, we may flounder in our identity. “What – and who – do you want to be?” is not a skill-set question, it is a character question.

Let’s clarify with the following questions:

When all is said and done, what do you want said about you at your funeral?

Is that a little too dark a question for you? Still not sure? Try this:

How would you describe yourself as a child?

Who are you when you are all alone?

These are telling questions that help answer who you are – your true self, not the false self that can be swayed by opinion, approval, present trends, or exhaustion.

Read and Respond

The following verse takes place days before Jesus’ arrest, (*false*) conviction, torture, and crucifixion.

“Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father. He had loved his disciples during his ministry on earth, and now he loved them to the very end.”

John 13:1 NLT

If you knew nothing else about Jesus Christ but this verse, what could you say about Him?

Jesus was certain of who He was. There’s not one of us who wouldn’t want that said about us! So, the first step is acceptance...“This is who I am...the good, the bad, and the ugly.” Who do you want to be? What are those attributes you want to define your life?

“But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit’s leading in every part of our lives. Let us not become conceited, or provoke one another, or be jealous of one another.”

Galatians 5:22–26 NLT

Of the highlighted qualities above, which would you consider a strength in your life? How has it shown itself in your day-to-day living? This is not a time for modesty. Instead, honesty will help you understand your true self.

Of this same list of qualities, where do you find yourself lacking? How has it shown itself in your day-to-day living?

God loves us just the way we are, but He wants us to be more like Jesus. The questions above are the Lord's tender way of giving guidance to bring this about.

If we belong to Jesus, our identity comes only from Him. Our minds are bombarded by what others say about us, and even by what we say about ourselves. Sometimes we think this is our real identity. In the verses above it says, "Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives."

Do you hear the leading of the Spirit in regards to the identity that God has given you? What would be different about your life if this new identity from God is what truly defines who you are?

Lauren Daigle gets it right when she looks to God for answers about her identity. She sings, "In You I find my worth, in You I find my identity."

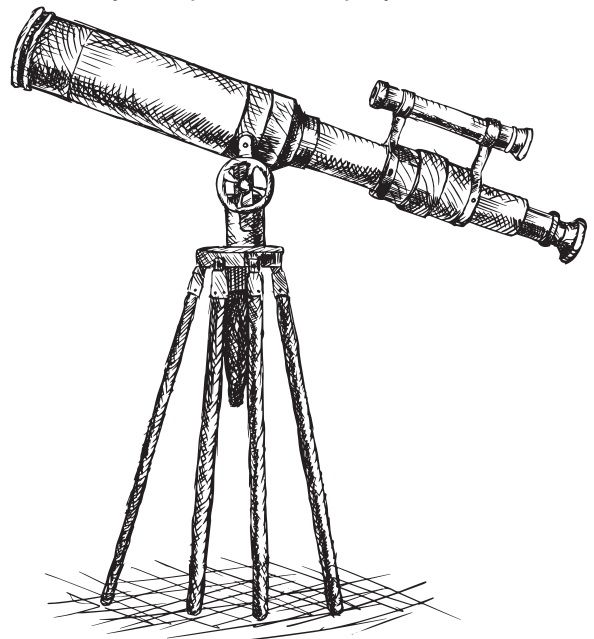
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIaT8Jl2zpI>

Reflect

With the enlightenment that the Lord has graciously given you, journal your thoughts, your desires, your dreams for who you are and who He has for you to become.

Prayer

"O God, Our Father, we know our own weakness,
Our minds are darkened,
and by ourselves we cannot find and know the truth.
Our wills are weak,
and by ourselves we cannot resist temptation,
or bring it to its completion that
which we resolve to do.
Our hearts are fickle,
and by ourselves we cannot give to you
the loyalty which is your due.
Our steps are faltering,
and by ourselves we cannot walk in your straight way.
So this day we ask you,
To enlighten us;
To strengthen us;
To guide us,
that we may know you, love you,
and follow you all the days of our lives."¹



¹ Barclay, William. *Prayers for the Christian Year*. SCM, 1964.



I do not at all understand the mystery of grace – only that it meets us where we are but does not leave us where it found us.

Anne Lamott

“The greatest trap of life is not success, popularity or power, but self–rejection.”

Henri Nouwen

For those who find the origin of idioms interesting, “off the hook” is traced back to the sport of fishing. When a fish is on a hook, the creature is obviously considered to be out of options; it’s trapped unless it is released. Just like a fish off the hook, someone who’s “off the hook” has been released from obligations or commitments.

“The meeting’s been cancelled, you’re off the hook.”

“No cooking tonight, we’ve been invited out, you’re off the hook.”

“My sister broke up with her fiancé, so I’m off the hook for buying her a wedding present.”

Receiving God’s grace means we are off the hook in payment for our sins. This is not some flippant remark like we’re in a Monopoly Game and just received a “Get Out of Jail Free” card. When we embrace the limitless kindness of God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, we receive what we do not deserve, while at the same time, we do not receive what we so justly deserve. Christ erases our debt and our sin is stamped “paid in full.”

Kari Jobe’s “Revelation Song” is all about worshipping God in response Jesus paying the price for our sin.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8-Gxjtd6Wp4>

Why is it that we, as daughters of the King, often cannot forgive ourselves? We feel we need to go through some kind of spiritual hoop jumping until we think we’ve done enough to cancel the heavy weight of our transgression. That kind of thinking makes us “junior saviors” and nullifies Christ’s sacrifice. How long is long enough to wallow in guilt? One day? Two days? Do you grade the sin to see how long you flounder in a state of perpetual penance? This is when we need to have a clear understanding of the difference between conviction and condemnation.

We are acquainted with condemnation because we see it and hear it all around us in our fallen world. Being belittled, bullied, harassed, mocked... you can fill in your own personalized condemnation. But words of condemnation are never spoken to us by God, and the voice in our heads that continually tries to shame and discourage us is not the voice of God’s Truth. Romans 8:1 should be on constant replay in our brains, “So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus.” (NLT). It is also important to remember that the following was written for believers and seekers alike, “But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.” (1 John 1:9 NLT). So come freely, confess openly, and believe confidently no matter where you are on your journey of faith.

Biblical conviction is a whole other story. Conviction from the Holy Spirit is the product of three characteristics at work in a Child of God:

- a) “a commitment to Scripture as one’s authority,
- b) the construction of specific beliefs and convictions based on that authority, and
- c) the courage to act on those beliefs in faith.”²

This is the Holy Spirit’s way of saying to us, “OK, you stumbled. Talk to me, let’s deal with it together. I am here not only to lift you up, but to help you go even higher.”

A sense of guilt can be a motivator to put us back on track after being derailed. It moves us out of this state of sinfulness and stirs us to embrace Christ's love with more passion, knowing His arms are open wide to receive us. Yet if we get "stuck" in a stage of guilt and shame for too long, there is a never-ending recording in our minds that turns this helpful tool of conviction into a dark, swamp of condemnation. This can become so toxic that we become stuck in this way of thinking. Toxic shame tells us "we're going to fail to reach our goals in life." It begets more shame, causing paralysis, faltering energy, escapism, withdrawal, people-pleasing, hiding behind a mask, perfectionism, criticism, and rage.

Name a transgression that you have sought God's forgiveness for and yet you feel there is still a lingering weight of guilt or shame.

Mentally refuse to carry that load any longer (i.e. imagine giving the shame back, as in handing back an unopened box to the person who has shamed you). Journal how that feels.

Ongoing guilt and shame is a "soul killer" and is foreign to the nature of God. God's mode of operation is to give the Child of God the tools to thrive, no matter the circumstances.

So, back to our "off the hook" phrase that we started with. This phrase used to be used under a whole different set of circumstances, and took on a totally different meaning depending on context. "That party was off the hook!" meant it had exceeded all expectations. This phrase can be applied to your life, for in Christ we can live a life that is totally off the hook!

"And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others."

2 Corinthians 9:8 NLT

Let's break down this verse and make it personal:

"And God will generously provide all you need."

What would your life look like if you truly lived as an abundantly blessed Child of God? Any changes from what it looks like now?

"Then you will always..."

What are those challenges that, if allowed, drain the hope you have found in Christ?

"...have everything you need and plenty left over..."

What is it you need to live victoriously over the "soul killer" in your life? Do you believe it is available to you?

"... to share with others."

God wants us to live abundantly, thriving in our relationship with Him for the sake of others. When you are able, in God's strength, to put this nagging guilt behind you, how would it affect your service to others?

² Keathley, J. Hampton. "Mark #6: Biblical Conviction." Bible.org, 26 May 2004, bible.org/seriespage/mark-6-biblical-conviction.

Prayer:

"Jesus said, 'Your sins are forgiven; rise and walk.'

Forgiveness is an unlocked door to walk through into wide—whoopee—open world.

*Forgiveness is a seed to water with new dreams and wild risks until
it bears unexpected fruit.*

Forgiveness is an enemy—friend to be born out of a quietness beneath the clamor.

Forgiveness is a flower to smell,

a wind at my back,

a gull to scream with,

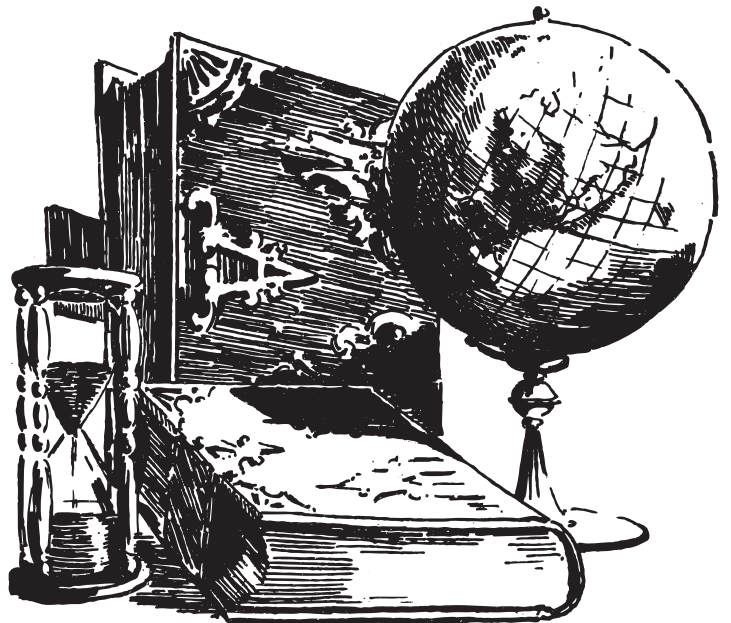
a pain to laugh beneath

a burden that carries me.

It is I becoming We, becoming Yours.

Forgiveness is a song to sing.

O Lord, unlock the door of my heart." Amen.³





“We need to do a better job of putting ourselves higher on our ‘to do’ list.”

Michelle Obama

“Life is a balance between what we can control and what we cannot. I am learning to live between effort and surrender.”

Danielle Orner

Many of us have childhood memories of an afternoon at the circus. We remember excitedly watching the high-flying trapeze artists who kept us on the edge of our seats as they flew through the air, or the courage of the lion tamer placing his head inside a lion’s mouth, and who can forget a dozen clowns stepping out of a miniature clown car!

Possibly, you’ve experienced a little-known circus act called the plate spinner. One by one, the plate spinner placed a china plate at the top of a dowel rod and began to spin it. The plate was spun with such precision that it would then balance on its own at the top of the rod. What added to the excitement was that the performer went down a line of standing rods spinning plates on them, until there were at least a half dozen or more spinning and balancing all at once. The challenge for the performer was to watch what plates were beginning to slow down and masterfully move his hand across the edge to keep them in motion and balance.

Let’s face it, we are plate spinners. Our days can be so chaotic that we feel like our life is a circus! We’ve got an assignment due at work/school (*spin plate*), the family gathering to attend (*spin plate*), your child’s parent/teacher conference (*spin plate*), the meal to get on the table (*spin plate*). When was the last time you exercised (*spin plate*)? Wait... don’t forget that assignment that’s due (*go back to that first plate and get it spinning faster*). You get the idea.

Search for “Chinese Plate Spinners” on YouTube. I’m not sure I have the same look of calm and elegance as I try to manage all of the “plates” I am spinning!

Our world is not the same as our foremothers who were keenly aware of the well-defined expectation of nurturing family and home... period. Mother Teresa so aptly said, “What can you do to promote world peace? Go home and love your family.” No truer words have ever been spoken, but we live in a multi-faceted world today, and family and home are just two of a myriad of important “plates” that most women are called to spin.

When surrounded by spinning plates, it helps to take a good, hard look at what fills our time and attention, and calls for so much of our energy. Where do we begin? What can be pared down, eliminated, or passed onto someone else, and what is ours to own?

The Apostle Paul may have been the greatest “plate spinner” of the New Testament. Not only did he travel the known world (*keep in mind his transportation was usually the two feet God gave him*) proclaiming the Lordship of Jesus Christ and establishing churches throughout his travels, but he was also misunderstood, harassed, beaten, and imprisoned as he lived out the life to which God had called him. You would think his obedience and passion for living out God’s call would make his life smooth sailing (*ever felt that way?*).

The following scripture is advice to Paul's fellow "plate spinners". What can you glean from his words of wisdom that will help you find better balance in your life?

"Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy, for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now. And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

"So it is right that I should feel as I do about all of you, for you have a special place in my heart. You share with me the special favor of God, both in my imprisonment and in defending and confirming the truth of the Good News. God knows how much I love you and long for you with the tender compassion of Christ Jesus.

"I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ's return."

Philippians 1:3-10 NLT

Making it Personal

Life is a journey with changing seasons and shifting demands. You have a deep desire to live your life for Christ while navigating the maze of responsibilities in your life.

"And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns."

Philippians 1:6 NLT

Write briefly of a moment when you felt the hand of God guiding a decision you needed to make. What was the outcome? How do you feel as you remember this incident?

Reminiscing about God's loving guidance is reassuring as you seek His face for balance in the many demands on your life today. Let these words wash over you:

"I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ's return."

Philippians 1:9-10 NLT

Every life has a measure of stress. Good stress is that bit of tension that reminds us what needs to be emphasized for we don't lose our way in the maze of life's demands and find it hard to sift through to find priorities. So let's focus:

Right now, what is important, what is the priority of your life?

Now that you have been reminded of God's guidance in the past and are able to put some of the top responsibilities (*spinning plates*) in some kind of order...what about everything else that calls for your time and attention? Remember Paul's words:

"... for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now... You share with me the special favor of God, both in my imprisonment and in defending and confirming the truth of the Good News."

Philippians 1:5,7 NLT

Being able to do it all is an invented standard. Remember, Supergirl is a comic character! Going solo can suck the life blood out of us. Throw away pride and the “I can do it all” mentality because it causes an exorbitant amount of stress.

So...who is your support system, your tribe, the people who have stood by you through thick and thin? Some names will come to mind immediately, but ponder this for a few moments.

Are there people who could help assist you in your plate spinning? Possibly take this plate from you? Name them and how they could help:

Let’s recap: you’ve seen God’s hand in your past, you’re seeking His hand for the present, and you’ve even listed some possible helpers along the way. Now comes the surgery! You may need to make some ruthless cuts. Remember, a gracious “no” can suck the power out of the sin of grandiosity.

Is there something that needs to be removed from your life? Could you sacrifice a “good” for a “best”?

Prayer:

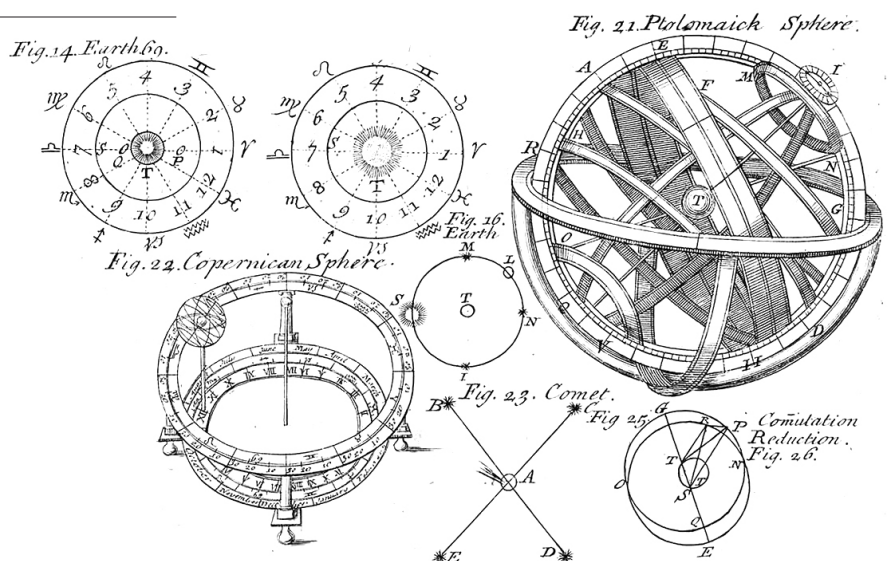
Lord, I believe that today is a gift and that everyday miracles are in it waiting to be discovered. Help me to seek the balance between hustle and rest so I can hear from you through the myriad of voices in my day. Help me to start my day mindfully and end it with the contentment of a job well done.

Remind me that I am not alone in this journey; you have given me precious friends and family to help me along the way. Help me swallow my pride and ask for help where needed.

Help me ruthlessly look at what is on my plate and be willing to graciously say “no” to what is not best for me and the ones I love.

This is a tall order, but you are an Awesome God, and I am listening and will be quick to obey.

Amen.





“Loving your body only when it’s in perfect shape is like loving your kids only when they’re well-behaved.”

Unknown

“We are not physical beings having a spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings having a physical experience.”

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Have you ever considered how many times a day you look at your reflection? How often you check yourself out in a mirror or walk by a store window and glance at your image in the glass? “How’s my hair?” “Do these pants make my butt look big?” “Am I color-coordinated today?” “Am I attractive?” “Do I have a small enough waistline?”

In his book, *Coming to Our Senses*, Morris Berman points out that around the 1500’s there was a rise in the production of an invention: the mirror. After this turning point in history, we see a shift from attentiveness to the development of the inner life to people living almost entirely outside of themselves. America has created a massive industry out of the obsession of the outward appearance in Hollywood and Madison Avenue. The development of the “inner self” pales in comparison to our obsession with the “outer self”.

The majority of Americans are preoccupied with body image. *“Body image is the mental representation one creates, but it may or may not bear close relation to how others actually see you. Body image is subject to all kinds of distortion from internal elements like our emotions, moods, early experiences, attitudes of our parents, and much more. Nevertheless, it strongly influences behavior. Preoccupation with and distortions of body image are widespread among American women (and, to a lesser extent, among males), but they are driving forces in eating disorders, feeding severe anxiety that can be assuaged only by dieting.”*⁴

It’s a mind game. How you feel about your body is a choice. Two very important questions need to be asked in this battle of body image: “what are the voices I’m listening to?” and “how are they affecting my perception of my body?”

Check out “Dove’s Real Beauty Sketches – You’re More Beautiful Than You Think.” This is a startling demonstration of how we are affected by our body image.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=litXW91UauE>

⁴ “Body Image.” *Psychology Today*, Sussex Publishers, www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/body-image.

The Voices Without

First of all, you must consider the source. Where do the images and messages that enter your sight and infiltrate your mind come from? It is important to note that many of the images we see and admire have been painstakingly altered. Even with a great genetic pool, the fashion model still has an army of makeup artists, lighting professionals and experts in computer imaging behind her. It goes without saying that a powerful advertising force is telling us that she is the epitome of today’s “it” girl. There’s a brain trust behind this model that has studied the human psyche to lure every woman into wanting to become her.

Today’s influences in advertising are extremely powerful... how do we wisely navigate it? How do we discern what is the right body image for me? We need to examine if the attention we give it has crossed the line to obsession. There is nothing wrong with checking yourself out in a mirror, adding makeup to enhance your features, or gleaned fashion tips from today’s trends that are attractive for your body type. How do we know when it becomes a fixation and is no longer God-honoring? Is it possible that my body image has become a form of idol-worship?

Consider a Scriptural View

“We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ.”

2 Corinthians 10:5 NLT

Let’s break this verse down into manageable bites as we apply it to today’s body image struggle:

“We destroy every proud obstacle...”

In establishing an image of your body that is life-giving and God-honoring, what message may be contrary to the image God has for you and needs to be “demolished”?

“... that keeps people from knowing God.”

What voices have exaggerated supposed flaws in your body or unrealistic expectations for physical perfection? Is there a person or situation in your past that has affected how you viewed your body or has distorted the way God views your body?

“We capture their rebellious thoughts...”

Zero in on the specific message you have received that fosters shame for the body you are presently living in.

“...and teach them to obey Christ.”

Submit to Christ any situation, conversation or feeling that created shame in your perception of your body. Share the specifics. What is His response? How do His words make you feel?

In her book *Nothing to Prove*, author Jennie Allen shares her struggle with body image:

“Healing rarely happens overnight. But now I wasn’t alone in the fight. When thoughts flooded my mind about what I could or couldn’t eat or when and how I would exercise or weigh again, when I would pass a mirror or zip up my pants or look at a menu, or when someone noticed or talked about my weight, through every anxiety that invaded, I clung to Jesus. I thought of Him, I talked to Him, I asked for His help, I asked for His perspective, I read His Word, I recited verses that came to mind. So now flooding my brain alongside the obsessive thoughts was Jesus and His love for me and His words.”⁵

One size does not fit all...

As we differ in body types, we also differ in practical body health. What works for someone else may not work for you. Also, if we become so narrowly focused on one area we still may not be doing what is necessarily healthy for our bodies...and souls.

Here are some very broad strokes for a healthy body that are important areas to consider in maximizing the “best you”.

- Eat well...
- Move daily...
- Hydrate often...
- Sleep lots...
- Love your body...
- Repeat for life!

From the above list, what might be one or two areas where God is speaking to you and what are those manageable steps you can take for continued physical health?

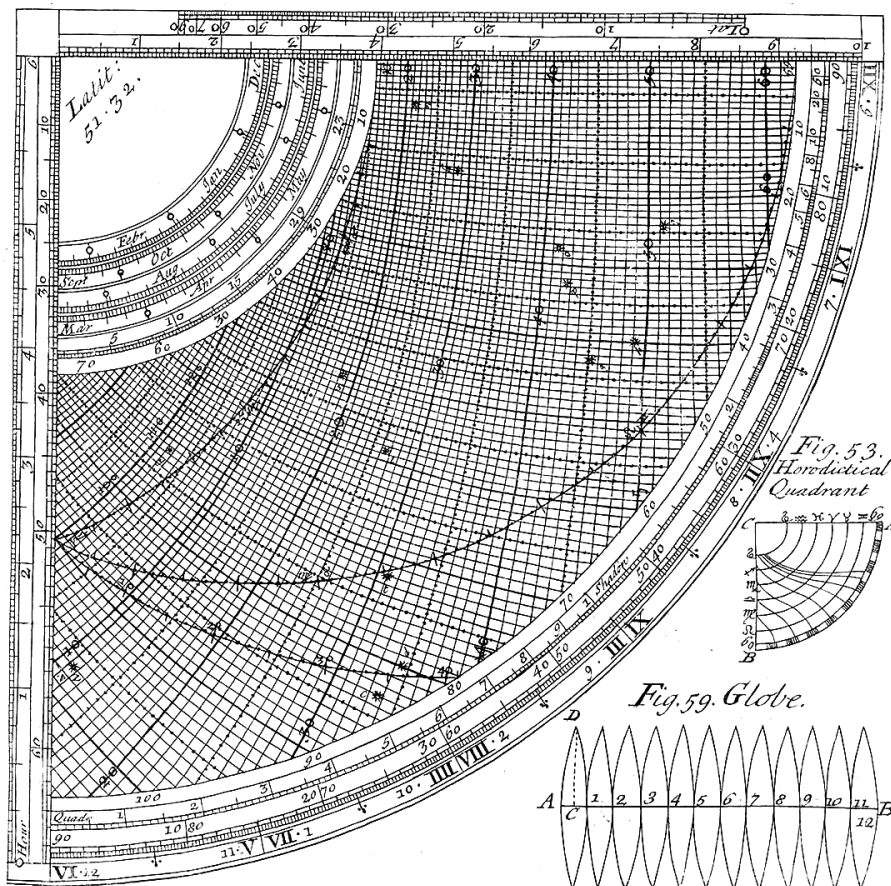
⁵ Allen, Jennie. *Nothing to Prove: Why We Can Stop Trying so Hard*. Waterbrook, 2018.

Prayer:

“Dear Heavenly Father, You know my heart and my struggle. You know the wrestling match I’m in between trying to meet a cultural standard of beauty, and knowing that in You is where my true value can be found. Today, please help me to remember Jesus’ great sacrifice for me that had nothing to do with what I look like. Help me to know that I’m already enough – no matter what the scale or magazine covers say. Keep my focus this day on you, your kingdom, and your love and off my perceived body flaws. Remind me that my purpose for today is far greater than how I compare to her... or her...or her. Help me to aspire only to look and be more like you. I need your strength, Dear God. Please fill me with your Spirit and empower me to fight this battle well today.

Amen”⁶

Fig. 56. Suttons Quadrant



N^o II *



“What did people do when they went to the bathroom before smart phones?”

Aaron Cobra Mervis

““There are few times that I feel more at peace, more in tune, . . . than when I force myself to unplug.”

Harlan Coben

Let’s face it. . . . we have a love/hate relationship with our devices. We love what they can do for us because we have the world at our fingertips, and yet we hate that they seem to hold us captive to their influence. The latter is obvious by our dependency on and time management of technology.

Much has been studied and written about the effects of technology on the individual. Our devices have changed the way we “do life” in a myriad of ways from connecting with others, doing business, and shopping, to how we view entertainment and receive news.

What about technology and its influence on the inner life? Can the texts and images that scroll past us at accelerated speed day in and day out do a number on our souls? Do we find ourselves spending more and more time on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Messenger and the like? In other words, technologically speaking, “How is it with your soul?” This study is not, dear reader, a slap on the wrist because of your dependency on being plugged in or a call to throw out your iPad, cell phone or computer. The digital age is here to stay and has infiltrated every aspect of life. We all need to take a good look at our day to see when we could, for some intentional moments, unplug for the sake of our soul.

Technology has a way of distorting our reality, or presenting a different reality to others. The things we see and the things we send to the world do not always tell the whole story.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0EFHbruKEmw>

We live an increasingly sound–polluted and frenetic life and therefore need, now more than ever, to become deliberate about seeking to turn from the complex wiles of the world to the simplicity of the love of God. Consider some of these benefits for becoming unplugged and finding more space for your soul to connect with God:

“*The best things in life aren’t things*” (Art Buchwald) – Virtual reality removes us from reality, so don’t miss the life that is happening right in front of you! Phone calls and FaceTime are wonderful inventions, but nothing can replace being in the same room having face to face contact to enjoy every nuance of connecting with someone.

Quietness for your soul is harder when connected. Silence and solitude will always take intentional action to quiet the distractions from without. Turn off the computer, put your cell phone on vibrate and place it in another room. This is only the beginning to dispelling the noise, as there are internal voices that can be more challenging, but this is a place to start.

Staying connected can conjure negative feelings. Researchers have concluded that one out of every three people scrolling Facebook do not always have a feeling of connection and community with their Facebook friends. Studies show Facebook users dealing with feelings of emptiness and jealousy as they view Facebook friends’ activities.⁷

The writers of the Bible had no idea of our digital lives, but they understood the importance of harnessing time with God and the seriousness of taking a sober look at those things that would rob us of that time, and then taking steps to regain good spiritual equilibrium.

⁷ Sifferlin, Alexandra. “Why Facebook Makes You Feel Bad About Yourself.” *Time*, *Time*, 24 Jan. 2013, healthland.time.com/2013/01/24/why-facebook-makes-you-feel-bad-about-yourself/.

Place it all before God

Read the following selected verses from Psalm 139 (NLT) in light of your relationship with technology.

“O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I’m far away. You see me when I travel and when I rest at home. You know everything I do. You know what I am going to say even before I say it, Lord.”

Psalm 139:1–4 NLT

As you reflect on God’s presence regarding your use of technology, what feelings arise? Are there areas when it is a positive influence, and are there times when the use of your devices has a negative effect?

“You go before me and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to understand!”

Psalm 139:5–6 NLT

From your response to the first question, is there anything God is inviting you to in the area of your time and attention to technology?

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends You, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.”

Psalm 139:23–24 NLT

Now that this area of your life has been investigated by the Holy Spirit, are you feeling drawn to a change in your connection to technology? What is He calling you to resolve moving forward? If there is a change He is calling you to consider, ask Him to help you make it realistic and reasonable.

Prayer:

“Lord, I am so often overtaken by machines, trapped by technology... Sometimes I feel controlled by what I should be controlling.

Help me to find my life again, enhanced and not eroded by these technical aids. Help me to take control, at least in my heart, and put them in their place. I do know that it is really a useful, impressive tool... But I know too that it is a tool to be subordinate to human needs and human cares.

May technology serve us Lord, so that we may better serve one another, and You.

Amen”⁸

⁸ Astley, Jeff. “Prayer for Use of Technology.” *After Sunday, After Sunday*, www.aftersunday.org.uk/prayer/for-work/technology.





“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.”

Maya Angelou

The “Me Too” Movement is not about taking down powerful men or about targeting people, but giving people access to a healing journey.”

Tarana Burke

“The Me Too movement is an international movement against sexual harassment and assault. #MeToo spread virally in October 2017 as a hashtag used on social media to help demonstrate the widespread prevalence of sexual assault and harassment, especially in the workplace. It followed soon after with public revelations of sexual misconduct allegations...”⁹ These allegations were waged against prominent public figures in Hollywood, Washington, the Church and the like.

The “Me Too” campaign was created in 2007 long before hashtags even existed. “Me Too” campaign founder Tarana Burke began this grass-roots movement to reach sexual assault survivors in underprivileged communities. Following a number of sexual assault and harassment cases of some very prominent public figures in 2017, #MeToo exploded on Facebook as women of sexual assault were no longer willing to stand in the shadows. This has become a watershed moment for victims to tell their stories.

The mission of the #MeToo movement is two-fold:

Empathy – to give women victims of sexual assault the opportunity to find support by being heard, seen, and believed.

Awareness – that this sin is pervasive – 54% of American women report receiving “unwanted and inappropriate” sexual advances – and that there needs to be a place where victims go to and can be accompanied as they walk through the healing process.

Empowerment through Empathy

Simply put, empathy is a “fellow feeling”, to understand or feel what another person is experiencing through their frame of reference. There is something to be said when two women can look eyeball to eyeball to say “me too,” and sense that volumes have been expressed and understood. That is the beginning of the healing process.

If you can, look at the following scripture through the eyes of someone who has been sexually assaulted. This may not take any imagination for some – in fact, there may be hesitancy due to the wounds that have been so carefully buried. Give yourself time to absorb the message of the scripture and apply it to the tender memories that are evoked. For others who have not experienced sexual abuse, but want to understand the plight of their sisters, there is a need to go deep within memories to find a time when there may have been victimization in some fashion; preying on a weakness of yours. This could be an abuse of any kind – physical, mental, emotional or verbal. This is not to fabricate pain and suffering, but to come to the realization that we all have been abused in some form or another.

Scripture to Ponder

“So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.”

Hebrews 4:14–16 NLT

⁹ “Me Too Movement.” Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 18 Sept. 2018, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Me_Too_movement#2017_\(Alyssa_Milano\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Me_Too_movement#2017_(Alyssa_Milano)).

Looking at this scripture through the lens of any injustice that you may have experienced, what word or phrase stands out to you from the words above? If nothing catches your attention after the first reading, you are encouraged to read it a few times until something stands out. Take your time.

Does this chosen word or phrase resonate with anything from a past memory of abuse, harassment or injustice? Be specific.

These verses speak of Jesus' empathy with your past circumstances, especially because of the harassment and assault He endured during His life here on earth. How does that make you feel?

Imagine Jesus standing before you, patiently and mercifully listening to your incident of assault, and after a long silence, hearing him say, "I understand. Me too." What emotion comes to the surface?

The first step in any healing is acknowledging that you have experienced an injustice, bringing it out into the open in Christ's presence with a flesh and blood kindred spirit. Once light is shed on this dark place, healing begins.

"Then your salvation will come like the dawn, and your wounds will quickly heal. Your godliness will lead you forward, and the glory of the Lord will protect you from behind."

Isaiah 58:8 NLT

What word or phrase in this verse brings a sense of light and healing for you?

Healing through Awareness

The other aspect of the #MeToo Movement is awareness. The best place to start the awareness campaign is in the church, especially since #ChurchToo has been started to address and stop the sexual abuse that has happened within the church. Omitting opportunities for discussion about sexual harassment and assault in our society and not addressing it, whether from the pulpit, in Sunday School, small groups or youth groups, can be damaging for the Body of Christ.

It must be looked at through the lens of the Bible and therefore some of the hard portions of scripture need to be publically addressed. *"This includes the Genesis 34 account of the rape of Jacob's daughter Dinah, the gang rape of a Levite's concubine in Judges 19–21, and the rape of King David's daughter Tamar by her half-brother Amnon in 2 Samuel 13. I would also include the story of King David himself and Bathsheba, found in 2 Samuel 11; the Hebrew in which the account was written strongly supports, in my view, the interpretation that King David took advantage of her sexually."*

We must say no to a conspiracy of silence. Every man, woman, boy, and girl deserves to live free from the fear of sexual assault, and if that's to ever become a reality, our churches must be a major part of the effort. We can begin by significantly changing our approach to sexual abuse. Open and honest communication, and a passionate campaign, will make the church a safe place for the victim to land and to begin the dialogue that brings healing.

¹⁰ Hung, Eugene. "4 Ways Churches Can Respond to the #MeToo Movement." *Sojourners, Sojourners Magazine*, 1 Nov. 2017, sojo.net/articles/4-ways-churches-can-respond-metoo-movement.

Scripture to Ponder:

“So God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity. This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad.”

1 Corinthians 12:24b–26 NLT

Is there a sense that your faith community is a place where burdens can be shared, where judgement is put aside and healing can take place? Is there a way that you can make this ministry more effective in your place of worship?

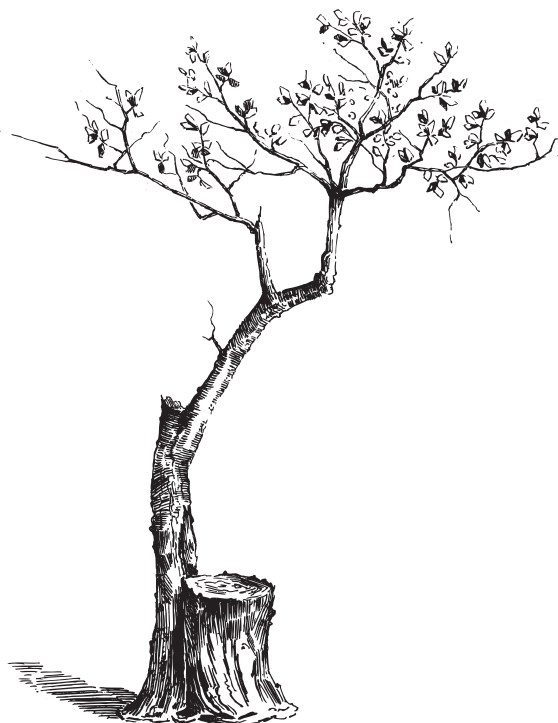
Prayer:

“God, you care deeply for broken–hearted people. Those wounded remain close to your heart. I want to know the pain and the anger you feel about this. I want to share your sorrow. But empathy is not enough for me. On behalf of those who have suffered abuse, I ask for justice. I ask you to restore what has been taken from them. Give them back what has slipped from their hands, their innocence, their hope, and their joy. For children who’ve been physically and emotionally abused by those stronger and more powerful – Lord, have mercy and heal them. For women who have suffered under sexual exploitation: Lord, have mercy and heal them. For those who have lost their own power to choose the direction of their lives: Lord, set them free. For those locked behind bars of oppression: God, give them strength and courage to find a path to liberty. Strengthen liberators who fight for justice. Grow indignation in me and in all your people against these offensive abuses. This is not your will; but you can use any tragedy to bring about your will. I pray that you will, and ask all these things in the name of Jesus.

Amen.”

For further reading:

We Were the Least of These – Reading the Bible with Survivors of Sexual Abuse, by Elaine Heath





Page 164.

The six studies that have been shared are far from conclusive. It is the prayer of all involved in the “True North” project that some of what has been written on these pages struck a chord and you want more. Continue the dialogue with others and with the Lord!

Hopefully you have been reminded that you are not alone in your journey as a young woman in today’s world wanting to know who you are in Christ. Trust that He is always speaking to you and desires to have a truly intimate relationship with you as you walk your journey so that you will gain God–confidence in this life of yours.

“O God, your gracious Spirit
 moves over the mysteries of the living and dying
 and is strangely present to me
 in the falling of leaves,
 the call of the wild geese,
 a child’s birth,
 the light in a friend’s eyes,
 the sudden lifting of the heart,
 and the deep longing which brings me to you now.

Make me aware of your presence
 that wonder may have its way with me,
 my passion be released,
 my confidence renewed in the depths of your holiness
 until, for a moment,
 my longing for you be fulfilled
 and I know I am really free
 to share bread and intimacy,
 to laugh and exchange mercy,
 to be at ease in my struggles,
 bold in my loving,
 brave in facing down my terror,

hopeful in the rising music of your kingdom,
 joyful in my living,
 and graceful in my life becoming
 a song of praise ever sung to you.”

Ted Loder, Guerrillas of Grace

